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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BOSTON

CLASSICAL ART

Fifth Century Room
Red-figured vases

1920

CLASSICAL ART

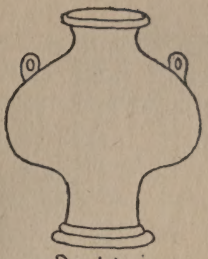
Fifth Century Room:
Red-figured vases

Department of Classical Art
Gallery Guide no. 12

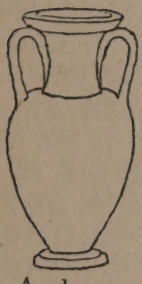
SHAPES OF VASES

Krater

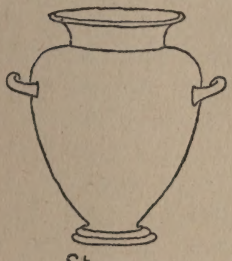
Krater



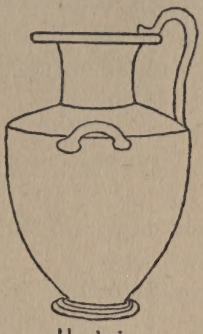
Psykter



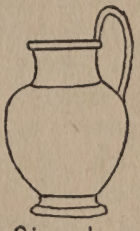
Amphora



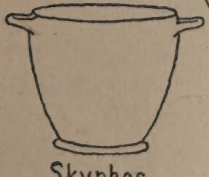
Stamnos



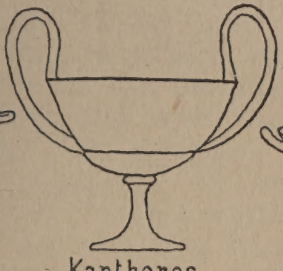
Hydria



Oinochoe



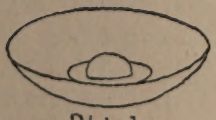
Skyphos



Kantharos

Kylix

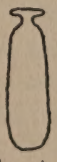
Rhyton



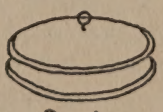
Phiale

Lekythos

Aryballos



Alabastron



Pyxis

CLASSICAL ART .

Fifth Century Room.

Red-Figured Vases.

The supremacy which Athens had gained in the sixth century B. C. as the centre for the production of pottery was maintained in the fifth century, in which the art reached its culmination. In this field the collection in the Museum ranks fifth in importance, being surpassed only by the collections in Munich, London, Paris and Berlin. Fifty of the finest pieces are exhibited in this room; the rest are in the Second Vase Room on the ground floor.

The vases here shown are distinguished from the earlier Athenian pottery in the Archaic Room, Case 2, in having the designs stand out in the natural color of the clay against a black background, whereas in the preceding period the figures appeared in black silhouette on a light ground. The outlines and details were executed in the same black paint with fine strokes of a brush, instead of being incised with a sharp tool. This reversal of technique had two distinct advantages: it made it possible to cover a much larger proportion of the surface with the lustrous black glaze, and it gave the painters a better opportunity to display their remarkable skill in line drawing.

The shapes which were in vogue in the earlier period continue to be used, but become more refined in proportion and outlines. They include two varieties of the krater, a mixing bowl for wine and water, the psykter, or wine-cooler, which was set into a larger vessel containing cold water, the amphora, a jar with a high neck and two vertical handles, the stamnos, a similar receptacle with a low neck and horizontal handles, the hydria, or water-jar, with three handles (two for lifting, one for pouring), the oinochoë, or wine-pitcher. Various forms of drinking cups were in use, such as the skyphos, a bowl with two small handles, the kantharos, a cup with a slender stem and two large vertical handles, the kylix, the most popular shape, a large shallow bowl with a stem and two handles, and the rhyton, or drinking horn, made in many fantastical shapes, for example, a mule's head. The phiale, a bowl with a boss in the centre, was used for pouring libations. The lekythos, aryballos and alabastron contained oil or perfumes. The pyxis was a cylindrical box with a cover, in which objects of a lady's toilet might be kept.

The subjects represented are mythological, as on the two kraters shown, and on most of the vases in Case 5, or scenes from everyday life, especially banquets and athletic exercises (cf. Case 2).

The drawing shows a marked development from what may be called the early severe style, through the developed severe style of the period of the Persian wars and later (490-450 B. C.), to the free style of the Periclean Age. The best works were produced during the first half of the fifth century; in the later period a distinct decline is apparent. A number of the foremost potters and painters occasionally signed their vases, and the evidence furnished by these attested works has made it possible to ascribe a large number of unsigned works to known artists. The Museum possesses several examples, signed or unsigned, of each of the four most famous factories, - those of Euphronios, Douris, Hieron and Brygos. Other artists whose names are unknown have been identified by their individual style. One of the most interesting of these is represented by four vases shown in this room, the krater with the representation of the death of Aktaeon (see below, page 14), an amphora (Case 2, No. 10) and two lekythoi (Case 5, Nos. 1 and 5).

A few examples of vases with designs in colors on a white ground are shown in Case 3. Such vases are comparatively rare; they were not well adapted to daily use since both the background and the paintings would rapidly deteriorate. The majority of them are lekythoi made as gifts to the dead (cf. Case 3, Nos. 8 and 10).

Case 2

Top Shelf.

1. Kylix (cup).

Interior. A young athlete running, with jumping weights in his hands. In the field, two measuring rods and the name Athenodotos.

Exterior. (a). Three youths holding javelins. (b). Two youths with javelins; a third holding jumping weights.

The single figure in the interior is drawn with a few simple strokes in a style still strongly archaic; the head and legs are in profile, while the shoulders and chest are in full front view. The outline of the lower part of the face appears against the shoulder, apparently to give an effect of perspective.

This, together with the character of the profile and other details, shows that the drawing is to be assigned to Euphronios, or to an artist who decorated many of the vases made at his factory.

2. Skyphos (cup).

(a). An athlete practising with jumping weights under the direction of a trainer. He is shown in a typical attitude of the broad jump, - the moment at the end of the preliminary upward swing of the weights. A small, blond-haired boy standing behind him is an interested spectator of the scene. He holds the athlete's staff, sponge and aryballos (oil-flask). Above, a bag for the weights hangs from the wall.

(b). Similar scene. The athlete is represented at the moment during the downward swing of the weights which succeeded the position illustrated on side A. His mantle is laid on a stool behind him, and above it, his oil-flask, sponge and strigil (flesh-scraper) are suspended. On the ground behind the trainer is a pick used to soften the ground of the landing-place for the jump, and a bag for the weights hangs above.

Though unsigned, these drawings are undoubtedly from the hand of Brygos, who was in some respects the most brilliant of the vase painters of the severe style. The clear and dramatic presentation of the action, the intense expressions of the faces and the fine drawing of the athletes' bodies in three-quarter view, without a trace of archaic stiffness, are noteworthy. The indication of the locality - in this case by athletic paraphernalia - is characteristic of this artist.

Note. The broad jump was the most important contest of the pentathlon, which included also running, throwing the discus (No. 5), throwing the javelin (No. 13) and wrestling (No. 13). The weights, used to increase the length of the jump, varied in shape and material. A leaden weight, like those held by the athlete on side A and by the jumper on the preceding vase, is exhibited on the floor of the case. Those held by the youth on side B were larger and probably of stone. A bronze strigil (flesh-scraper) is also shown on the floor of the case.

3. Kantharos (cup).

(a). Zeus pursuing a nymph. The locality - a sacred precinct - is indicated by the altar behind which is a palm tree.

(b). Zeus pursuing a boy, probably Ganymede, who has been playing with hoop and stick.

This vase is a masterpiece both of pottery and painting. The shape, though frequently represented on monuments, is rare among terra-cotta vases; it seems to have been used chiefly for vessels of silver and bronze, comparatively few of which have survived. The two lively groups are composed with admirable decorative effect. The principal lines of the figures and of the drapery express impetucus movement; the finely crumpled folds of the woman's linen dress are contrasted with the broader folds of the woolen mantles. A highly characteristic work of Brygos. Unsigned.

4. Small jug with one handle.

A youth dancing with krotala (castanets) to the music of the double flute played by a girl.
Ascribed to Brygos.

5. Kylix.

Interior. An athlete throwing the discus. In the field, two measuring rods, a sponge, oil-flask, and strigil.

Exterior. (a). Two jumpers, one of them in mid-air, and a trainer. (b). A jumper, a discus-thrower and a trainer.

From the factory of Euphronios and by the same painter as No. 1. The bold attempt to represent the twisted pose of the discus-thrower is noteworthy.

Middle Shelf.

6. Kylix. Symposium scenes,

Interior. A man reclining on a couch and twirling a wine-cup around by the handle, while a youth beside him plays the flutes and a flute case hangs near.

Exterior. (a). Two men on couches, and two youths as cup-bearers. (b). Three men reclining on couches.

The man on the interior and one on the exterior are playing the game of kottabos which was popular at banquets. It consisted in uttering a wish while throwing the lees of wine from the cup at a mark. This was a metal disk poised on a tall stand. The top of such

a bronze kottabos stand, in the form of a youth standing on a pillar, is exhibited nearby.

In composition and style the drawings resemble works by Brygos, but they are probably by another artist strongly under his influence.

7. Kylix.

A nude youth bending over a large basin set on a pillar. Compare the large bronze bath-basin exhibited in this room.

Ascribed to Douris.

8. Kylix. Drunken revels.

Interior. A man playing the flutes for his companion who is dancing in a circle around a staff propped under his arm-pit. In the field, a flute case and the signature of Euphronios, EVOPONIOS EPOIESEN (sic)

Exterior. A procession of eleven men dancing and staggering along from left to right.

The revellers are arranged in groups of two, but all the figures are linked together by their outspread arms so as to form a unified decorative scheme. The poses are varied and life-like, the bodies and drapery drawn with masterly skill, and the faces expressive. The vase, which is remarkable also for its size and beautiful outline, belongs to a somewhat later period than the other Euphronian vases shown in this case (Nos. 1, 5, 12).

9. Kylix.

A Maenad in Ionic dress and leopard skin, dancing with castanets. In the field, the signature of Kachrylion, +A+RVVION EPOIESEN

Kachrylion was one of the earlier masters of the severe red-figured style, as is shown by the archaic attitude of the figure and by the rendering of the profile and the eye. The drawing of details is extremely delicate.

Bottom Shelf.

10. Kylix.

A youth testing the straightness of an arrow by sighting along it. A quiver at his side from a cross-belt.

A fine, delicate drawing by a master of the early

severe style. The interesting motive is treated in a lively spirit.

11. Amphora.

(a). Zeus pursuing Ganymede, who holds a hoop and hoop-stick (as on No, 3).

(b). A youth carrying a joint of meat.

Ascribed to the master of the Aktaeon krater, which is exhibited in this room (See below, page 14).

12. Kylix.

Symposium scene: two men seated on a couch, one playing the flutes, the other vomiting. In the field, a flute case and a pair of boots.

This vase from the factory of Euphronios is remarkable for the daring composition of the picture. The complicated attitudes of both figures are successfully rendered, even to the two legs shown in front view. The profile of the youth is seen against his shoulder, like that of the athlete on No. 1. His companion is middle-aged; the wrinkled forehead with its suggestion of incipient baldness, the irregular nose, puffed cheeks and scanty chin-beard, give the effect of a realistic portrait.

13. Psykter (wine-cooler).

Palaestric scene: a pair of wrestlers, three pairs of youth practising with javelins, and a trainer between each group. The names of the figures are written beside them.

Vases of this shape are rare; they were made to contain wine and to be set in larger vessels filled with cold water. The athletic figures are well drawn and effectively disposed about the broad shoulder of the vase. They have been assigned to Phintias.

14. Plate.

Heracles, aided by Hermes, carrying off Cerberus from Hades. The excitement of the adventure is expressed by the rapid motion of the figures and by the naïve gesture of Hermes' left hand. Early severe style.

Case 5.

Top Shelf.

1. Lekythos (oil-jug).

A youth clad in a tunic, chlamys (short cloak), broad-brimmed hat and puttees, and armed with two spears, a club and a sword. He is on a hunting expedition, accompanied by his dog. Both have sighted the victim; the youth is bracing himself to hurl one of the spears.

A fine work by the master of the Aktaeon krater (see below, page 14).

2. Large Skyphos.

(a). Helen led away by Paris. The figures, in order from left to right, are Aeneas, Paris, Eros, Helen, Aphrodite, her attendant, Peitho, and a nameless boy under the handle.

(b). Helen's meeting with Menelaos, after the fall of Troy. He draws his sword to slay her, but hesitates, overcome by her beauty. The figures, in order from right to left, are Priam, seated under the handle, Menelaos, Helen, Aphrodite, Kriseis (Chryseis), Kriseus (Chryses). The names are inscribed beside the figures. The signature of the potter, Hieron, HIERON EPOIESEN is scratched on one handle; that of the painter, Makron, MAKRON: EGRAPSEN is painted on the background under the other handle.

This is one of the finest extant works from the factory of Hieron, and the only one bearing the signature of the painter, Makron, who decorated most of his vases. The pictures of Makron are inferior to those of Euphronios and Brygos in dramatic force, and his drawing of bodily details is sometimes careless, but in his treatment of drapery he is unsurpassed. In this case he "has almost completely covered the surface of the vase with the drapery of his figures, reducing the black background to a minimum, and distinguishing the individual figures and their intermingling draperies by exceedingly clever line work."

3. Aryballos (oil-flask).

Seven youths in conversation. On the bottom, a youth crouching.

This shape is especially common in Corinthian pottery, but rarely found with decorations in the Attic red-figured style.

4. Lekythos.

A poet reciting and accompanying himself on the lyre. He wears the full Ionian robes and a cap.

Middle Shelf.

5. Lekythos.

Eros flying through the air, carrying a fawn.
By the master of the Aktaeon krater (see below, page 14).

6. Lekythos.

A youth squatting on the ground with head thrown back, playing a lyre.
An interesting parallel to the figure on the right wing of the marble relief shown in this room.

7. Kylix.

Interior. Eos, the goddess of the dawn, about to carry away Kephalos, a young Athenian hunter. Her look is directed upwards, as if already planning her flight with him into the sky.

Exterior. Ten men in attitudes of surprise, four of them gazing upwards. Evidently they are imagined as witnessing the event depicted in the interior. The locality is suggested by an altar with a fire burning on it, a tree and a rocky slope beneath which a warrior is standing. Scratched on one handle, the signature of Hieron as potter, HIERON EPOIESEN

A comparison of these drawings with those on the Skyphos from the factory of Hieron (No, 2) shows that they are not by Makron, but by another artist with greater originality and dramatic sense. The group in the interior is an unusually beautiful composition. Another kylix from Hieron's factory, decorated by this artist with a representation of Telephos at Mycenae, is exhibited on the ground floor, Second Vase Room, Case 18.

8. Lekythos.

A ceremonial procession. Two cows with streamers of purple and white wool hanging from their horns are being led to the sacrifice by two youths. Before them a priestess, carrying a basket on her head, walks toward a temple which is represented by an Ionic column.

On the lip the signature of Gales, ΛΑΛΕΣ ΕΓΟΙΕΣΕΝ
Early severe style.

Bottom Shelf.

9. Amphora.

(a). Eos pursuing Kephalos who holds a lyre.

(b). A youth with a lyre. Compare No. 7.

10. Plate.

A Seilenos crouching, with drinking horn in right hand and flute case in left.
This type of figure was frequently used by the painters of the early severe style to decorate a circular space. The bestial features of the Seilenos are powerfully drawn.

11. Hydria (water-jar).

On the shoulder, three youths baiting a bull. On the front, a carpenter drilling a hole in the lid of a chest in which Danae and Perseus are to be imprisoned and thrown into the sea. At the left stands an elderly man, King Akrisios, stretching out his hand toward his wife, Eurydike, and his daughter, Danae. The boy, Perseus, held in his mother's arms, is intently watching the carpenter.
The varying emotions of the participants are clearly portrayed in the naïve manner characteristic of archaic Greek art.

12. Fragment of Kylix.

Menelaos and Helen (?).

Compare the scenes on No, 2.

13. Plate.

Thetis running, with head turned back. She holds a dolphin in each hand, and two others are in the field.
Early severe style.

14. Amphora,

(a). Hephaestos polishing the shield of Achilles under the direction of Thetis. Hanging above, a pair of greaves, a helmet, tongs, hammer and saw.

(b). Nike, the winged goddess of Victory, with oinochoe (wine pitcher) and phiale (libation bowl).

Case 3.

Top shelf.

1. Plastic Rhyton (drinking vessel) in the form of a bridled mule's head.

The sides of the cup, which rises from the top of the head are decorated with three figures - a Maenad fleeing from one Seilenos while another lies in wait for her.

The lively drawings are by Brygos (cf. Case 2, Nos. 2, 3, 4). Other plastic vases of various shapes are exhibited on the ground floor (Second Vase Room, Case 17).

2. Alabastron (tubular perfume bottle).

Three women are drawn in black outline on the white ground which covers most of the vase. One is dancing with castanets; the others hold flowers. Yellow paint is used to distinguish the two garments of the Ionic costume; in two cases the dress is colored, in the other the mantle. In the field, the inscription ΠΡΟΣΑΛΟΡΕΥΟ, a form of salutation.

Early severe style.

3. Kylix.

Interior. A Seilenos seizing a Maenad; two others dancing.

Exterior. Groups of men and women conversing.

The large inner picture, with its four lively figures, is an original and effective composition, though not free from faults of drawing.

4. Covered Kylix.

The group drawn in colors on the white ground of the cover represents Apollo in conversation with a nymph. He stands in front view, with his outspread arms enveloped in a purple mantle which hangs at his back. The nymph sits on a rock gazing at him, with her chin propped on her right hand, and holding his lyre with her left hand. Her sleeveless Doric dress, fastened by a long pin on her left shoulder, is colored light brown. The pin, her bracelet and Apollo's wreath are in relief and were

originally gilded. The body of the lyre is a tortoise shell.

The picture is remarkable for delicacy of drawing, beautiful coloring, and especially for the free and natural poses of the figures. It suggests, better than the red-figured vases, the qualities of Greek frescoes of the middle of the fifth century, no examples of which have come down to us.

5. Lekythos.

The death of Orpheus at the hands of a woman of Thrace. She wears a short, sleeveless dress and high boots, and is tatooed on the arms, in accordance with a Thracian custom. He is sinking to the ground, with blood streaming from a wound in his side.

Late severe style. The beautiful profile of Orpheus is drawn without a trace of archaism.

Middle Shelf.

6. Lekythos, with squat, almost spherical body.

The contest between Theseus and the Amazons. At the left, a duel between a warrior and an Amazon clad in a richly embroidered tunic and trousers; in the centre Hippolyte (ΙΠΠΟΛΥΤΗ) on horseback in combat with Theseus (ΘΗΣΕΥΣ) behind whom is a boy. Some details are modelled in relief, with traces of gilding.

The figures are executed in the free style of the Periclean age; the eyes, for example, are correctly rendered in profile. There is less angularity in the composition than in the work of the earlier painters, yet energy is not sacrificed to grace, and the drawing is still firm and vigorous.

7. Pyxis (toilet-box).

The six figures on the cover illustrate with astonishing completeness and truth of characterization a story in the Odyssey - the meeting of Odysseus and Nausika. Odysseus, awakened by the cries of the Phaeacian princess and her maids, who are at play by the seashore, comes cautiously from the thicket where he has slept. Athena, his patron goddess, leads the way. Two of the girls are running away in fright; one is busy with the washing of a garment, and does not see. The princess herself stands erect, calmly awaiting the approach of the stranger.

The picture, executed about 430 B. C., was probably inspired by some well-known work, perhaps a painting by Polygnotos.

8. White Lekythos.

Jugs of this shape with drawings in color on a white ground were made especially as offerings to the dead, and the scenes depicted on them often resemble those on Athenian grave monuments, two examples of which are exhibited in this room. Here a lady stands looking at an attendant who holds her jewel box. A sakkos (cap) and a pitcher are shown hanging from the wall.

The outline drawings are of unusual beauty and delicacy, in the style of about 450 B. C. The vase is unbroken; the yellow color of the lady's Ionic dress, the red of her mantle, and the brown framework of the box are perfectly preserved. Compare No. 10.

9. Oinochoe (wine pitcher) with wide, cylindrical neck.

A Seilenos playing the lyre, and a Maenad holding a kantharos (wine-cup) and a thyrsos (staff wreathed with ivy).

The same skillful miniature painter decorated three other oinochoe shown in this case (Nos. 11, 14, 18).

10. White Lekythos.

A lady seated in a chair, and an attendant standing before her. Hanging in the field, a mirror, an oinochoe and a sakkos.

The drawings are by the same hand as those on No. 8, and, if anything, of even finer execution.

11. Oinochoe. Duel between a youthful warrior, armed with Attic helmet, greaves, shield and spear, and a bearded archer in Scythian costume. The latter has just shot an arrow past his opponent, and is defending himself with his sword.

Compare Nos. 9, 14, 18.

12. Lekythos with squat, almost spherical body.

Group of three women with a child.

Bottom shelf.

13. Phiale (libation bowl).

Men entertained by courtesans, one of whom is

dancing, another playing the flutes. The eight figures, sharply defined against the black background in lively and varied poses, form an admirable decoration for the circular field of the bowl. On the boss in the centre, a winged victory with wine pitcher and basket.

14. Oinochoe. Two youths with a dog.

Compare Nos. 9, 11, 18.

15. Fragment of a large vase.

Head of a female Centaur, identified by the horse's ears. A remarkably careful drawing in the free style of the late fifth or early fourth century, and interesting because of its unique subject. A painting by Zeuxis representing a pair of Centaurs with their young is known to us through a description by Lucian, and it is possible that the scene on the vase was inspired by the work of this famous painter.

16. Kylix.

Interior. Herakles, rescuing his wife Deianeira from the Centaur Nessos.

Exterior. Battle between the Lapiths and Centaurs at the wedding feast of Peirithoos. The names of the persons represented are inscribed beside them.

The figures on the exterior fall into groups of two, some of which seem to have been suggested by metopes of the Parthenon. Another kylix with almost identical designs and evidently by the same hand, is exhibited on the ground floor (Second Vase Room, Case 18). It is signed by Erginos as potter and Aristophanes as painter. This artist worked in Athens near the close of the fifth century.

17. Fragment of an Oinochoe. The Tyrannicides.

The Athenian youth Harmodios, with his friend, Aristogeiton, killed Hipparchos, the brother of the tyrant Hippias in 514 B. C., and the two were afterwards honored at Athens as the liberators of their country. Statues of them which had been erected in the market-place were carried off to Persia by Xerxes in 480 B. C., and restored by Alexander the Great 150 years later. Meanwhile the Athenians had set up a second pair of statues, marble copies of which are preserved in the Museum at Naples. The figures on the vase fragment are also copies of this second group, and furnish the correct restoration of the missing parts of the replicas in Naples.

18. Oinochoe.

A youth offering a wine-cup to a bearded man.

Compare Nos. 9, 11, 14.

In separate cases against the window wall.

Krater (mixing bowl).

(a). The death of Aktaeon. As a punishment for having seen Artemis bathing, the young hunter Aktaeon was transformed by the goddess into a stag, and was torn to pieces by his hounds. In some representations of this scene (for example, on a krater in the Second Vase Room, Case 24) antlers are shown growing out of Aktaeon's head. Here the transformation is not suggested; the youth is sinking upon the ground, attacked by four dogs, while Artemis aims an arrow at him.

(b). Pan pursuing a shepherd.

The originality and dramatic quality of his designs, and the skillful drawing of details, such as the elaborate draperies of Artemis, place this painter among the foremost masters of the developed severe style. His name is unknown, but more than forty of his works have been identified by their individual style, in addition to this krater, which is his masterpiece. Five others are in the Museum, three being exhibited in this room - an amphora (Case 2, No. 10) and two lekythoi (Case 5, Nos. 1 and 5).

In the middle of the room.

Krater (mixing bowl). Scenes from the Trojan War.

(a). The combat of Achilles and Memnon over the body of Melanippos. Achilles is supported by Athena, Memnon by his mother Eos, the dawn goddess.

(b). The duel between Diomedes and Aeneas, the Greek hero being aided by Athena, the Trojan by his mother, Aphrodite. The names of the figures are inscribed beside them.

An ambitious work of the developed severe style, but less skillfully drawn than the picture on the preceding vase.

Books and photographs relating to the branch of art described in this book are open to use by all visitors in the Library of the Museum, over the Huntington Avenue Entrance.

Copies of this book may be obtained at the Sales Office at the Huntington Avenue Entrance. Price: 25 cents each.

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